Georgia Forestwatch

FOREST NEWS

Protecting and restoring Georgia's native ecosystems.

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Cerulean warbler ~ used with permission from Acorn Graphics, Inc.

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GFW Forest News ~ Autumn
GFW Editorial
by Brent Martin, GFW Executive Director

On August 24, the Forest Service had its last public meeting before issuing its Draft Environmental Impact Statement on our new forest management plan for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. Standing there in the room filled with DNR Game Officials, Ruffed Grouse Society members, and long standing members of Georgia Forestwatch, I actually felt nostalgic. I thought, here I am, actually getting old with these people. It was almost seven years ago that we began this process, and will be another year before a Final is issued, so don't I have the right to feel this way? There were the old familiar faces, with the same old tired arguments, stronger than ever now with the Cerulean warblers, Golden-winged warblers, ORV enthusiasts, and Put-and-Take fisherman on their side. But I loved them nonetheless. They've made my life interesting, and for that, if nothing else, I offer thanks. Or maybe I'm just going mad.

Anyway, it was a meeting like so many meetings before. Poorly organized, thoughtless format, mind-boggling levels of confusing documentation, and lots of green uniforms. Most people gave up quickly, jotted their comments down on the little forms that the Forest Service had given us, and left. Those of us paid to comprehend the gibberish spent a great deal of time trying to explain as deftly as possible to whomever would listen what all of the options, prescriptions, emphases meant, but most folks glazed over pretty quickly. They just wanted the place taken care of, to feel that it was in good hands, and to know that most of it would someday be as magnificent as it was four hundred years ago. What we all want. Forest protection, however, has become a complicated business, and nothing is simple anymore. Our State DNR develops more complex arguments everyday (they've bullied their way into getting food plot management into almost every land allocation!), ORV's grow in numbers and power, and politicians tout the virtues of management written by timber company executives.

I left the meeting feeling dejected, but not beaten. Earlier that week I had spent a long day deep in one of our forest's last remaining old growth stands with Jess Riddle, one of the brightest minds we have today working to understand this forest. It was cooler than usual, and we covered a great deal of ground, only once leaving the stand's edge to meander the border of an old Forest Service clearcut. All day we wandered through a forest that had operated on its own for millions of years, free of food plots, ORV trails, stumps, and whatever else we have thrown at this forest for the last two hundred years. If this little plot of forest has survived for all of these years without being destroyed, surely we could add a little to it, bring a little back? All we had to do was get some of these folks out to see its magnificence, and surely

---Director's Editorial continued on page 7

Brent on Johns Mtn., Armuchee Rd. photo C.Selfrid
D.C. Update.......  
Let's put out fires out West...and in Washington

This fire season out West has been a severe one, and it's not over. This is due to drought and the legacy of timber extraction. Industrial logging increases risk of fire by removing fire-resistant large trees; promoting moisture loss from soils; leaving slash, i.e. tinder, on the ground; and requiring new road construction (many fires are caused by people within 100 yards of a road). Still, a loose consensus among forest managers, fire scientists and environmentalists exists on the need for carefully targeted tree thinning as one tool for reducing wildfire hazards. The essential element is removal of brush and dense understory trees, not large-diameter mature and old-growth trees. Western trees such as ponderosa pines and sequoias evolved with fire, and mature specimens have natural resistance to it.

Western politicians, acting for their logging-industry patrons, accuse environmentalists of creating the forest fire crisis. This is a vicious and unfounded accusation. Certainly environmental activists use administrative appeals and litigation to force the United States Forest Service to obey the law and protect old-growth forests and endangered species. Yet, the General Accounting Office, the non-partisan research wing of Congress, found that only 20 out of 1,640 fire-hazard reduction projects planned over the last two years had been appealed, and none taken to court. In response, the Forest Service claimed to have its own list of 326 projects, of which 154 had been stopped by appeals or lawsuits. But, when Reps. Jay Inslee (D-WA) and Mark Udall (D-CO) asked to see this list, the agency could not produce it.

Still, the effort to unleash the timber industry on public lands with little citizen oversight is gaining momentum. In May Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) introduced Senate Bill 2474, the so-called “Public Lands Planning and Management Improvement Act of 2002”, and in July Rep. Dennis Rehberg (R-MT) introduced the H.R. 5214, “The National Forest Fire Prevention Act”, in the House. These bills seek to limit or eliminate meaningful citizen participation, judicial review and appeals for various projects, most likely timber sales masquerading as fire-reduction activities. Since timber corporations want access to profitable large-diameter trees, they have no interest in cutting small trees and underbrush, the very ones that require attention in order to significantly reduce fire risk. So the proposed treatment is more industrial logging, which created the existing hazardous conditions in the first place. If environmental laws are suspended, citizens would have no means to legally challenge this destructive and cynical strategy.

Since these bills aren’t going to pass in this session, Sens. Craig and Pete Domenici (R-NM), possibly with help from Western Democrats such as Dianne Feinstein (CA), will offer a “rider” to the interior appropriations bill that would enact similar policies. As of time of publication, we have not seen the language of the Craig/Domenici fire rider so it remains unclear how far the exemptions from law would go and what parts of the landscape would be at risk, but chances are that Eastern forests will be included, since the real goal is to increase timber production without obstruction from pesky activists. It very well could be the worst logging rider ever, if the above bills are any indication.

Please call Senators Miller and Cleland and let them know that citizens must not be pushed out of the way by the timber industry under cover of the forest fire crisis. Tell them to OPPOSE THE CRAIG/DOMENICI RIDER TO THE INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS BILL.

~by Randall F. White

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A View from Currahee Mountain, Chattooga Ranger District

I am constantly amazed at the natural world around me. Here in the upper Piedmont are thousands of species of plants and animals, probably hundreds of thousands if you look at the smallest organisms. My interest in all of this began by noticing bugs, insects that came to lights at night. Golden Book children’s field guides gave me a hint of the potential diversity in nature, although the word “diversity” would not enter my vocabulary for decades. A few years later the spring bird migration became obvious when a redstart rested in a tree outside the sunroom window. Geology, botany, zoology, fossils, wildflowers and ferns, snakes and frogs all drew my attention in their turn. Discovery of species in parks and woodlots continued unabated for years, lists proliferated. I was a real nature nerd.

One summer, a wonderful book at the public library caught my attention. As I checked it out, the librarian commented that it was a college text and I would probably not understand much of it. She was right to some extent, and I would have another try at it years later, but I understood enough of Eugene Odum’s “Fundamentals of Ecology” to change my life. All those species on all those lists interacted with each other and their physical environment in complex ecosystems that were little understood. As a science, ecology developed the methods for investigating and understanding ecosystems. A walk in the forest would never be the same. Discovery of species I had never noticed before is still exciting, but speculating about why it lives there at this point in time and its relationship to other species, soil and landscape is really more enlightening.

In a later work, “The Value of the Tidal Marsh”, Dr. Odum began to define the value to society of a healthy, functioning ecosystem. Our health cannot be sustained independent of healthy ecosystems. Eugene Odum was trying to put the “eco” back into economics.

I finally met Dr. Odum at a “stakeholder” meeting about Georgia forests. Foresters, private landowners, environmental groups and public land managers were all represented. Dr. Odum’s message at the opening touched on the same theme, the value of healthy forest ecosystems

GFW/Oconee Prescribed Burning Comments ~~~John Paul Schmidt, Oconee District Leader

Many stands proposed for prescribed burns in 2003 - for example Compartments 165, 166 and 167 in the Turkey Neck, Oglethorpe County - were burned as recently as 3 years ago. This is a very rapid return time for fire on the Piedmont where management for RCW is not the guiding objective. In such a short time, there can have been little fuel buildup. Such frequent fires may actually deplete the system of nitrogen and thereby lower productivity (White 1986). Also, by structurally simplifying the forest, even lobolly pine stands may suffer significantly diminished value as bird and wildlife habitat (Lohr et al, 2002).

Many bottomland hardwood and hardwood slope stands are included among those to be burned. These are stands which would have burned rarely if at all historically. Moreover, burns especially winter burns of these stands may have very harmful effects on bird, reptile and amphibian species. Once again, many vertebrate species depend to greater or lesser degree on coarse woody debris for nesting, foraging, wintering and as refuges to escape predators. Wholesale burning of these stands greatly simplifies and may seriously degrade them as vertebrate habitat. Furthermore, these are habitats with the greatest herbaceous plant diversity on the forest, the effect of frequent winter burns on these species is unlikely to be positive. Frequent burns may also foster the growth and spread of disturbance-loving invasive exotic species such as Nepal grass (Microstegium) which is then better able to compete with and limit native herbaceous species in recently disturbed bottomlands.

I object in the strongest terms to a repeat burn of any portion of Compartment 109 (excepting Stands 8 or 2) which is currently recommended for Botanical Area prescription in the new forest plan. The last burn, while completely ineffective in limiting woody emergent trees and shrubs on the site, did either kill or destroy the aboveground growth of Oglethorpe oaks and saplings along with native azaleas and many fire-sensitive herbaceous species. These are the species which make the site scenic and interesting botanically. The beaver swamp/marsh which

Newtown Florist Club members join GFW’s Jennifer Rodriguez and James Sullivan at Dukes Creek Falls at last Spring’s outing organized by both groups to enjoy the Chattooga Ranger District’s wonders.
Thanks to old growth savant Jess Riddle, Georgia Forestwatch has completed its second summer of old growth research and once again has made several significant finds. We are now up to over seventy sites ranging from five to three hundred acres. One of the largest stands is south of the Cohutta wilderness on the west side of Rocky Face mountain. This stand is approximately three hundred acres and is one of the most representative stands of old growth dry-mesic Oak forest on the Chattahoochee. One of the Chestnut oaks cored in the stand is 337 years old. The Forest Service clearcut most of the ridgetop several years ago, but the end of Rocky Face was left uncut with 200+ White oaks dominating the canopy. It is one of our Mountain Treasures areas that we are asking protection for in the new forest plan. Despite our request, the area is currently in a 9.H Vegetative Restoration prescription that allows logging, new food plots, and new ORV trails. The area should be placed in a 6.A old growth management prescription.

Another significant find was east of the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area in the Coppermine Gap/ Puncheon Gap area. This stand, which has not yet been completely surveyed for its boundaries, is over three hundred acres and contains large diameter, old growth Tulip trees (47" diameter on one particularly impressive one), Northern red oaks, and Chestnut oaks. We also found remnant Table mountain pine in this stand. Once fully surveyed, this could be one of the largest tracts of old growth left on the Chattahoochee. As with Rocky Face, the area is currently in a 9.H Vegetative Restoration prescription and should be placed in a more appropriate old growth prescription.

We also found additional old growth acreage in Kelly Ridge and Mountaintown roadless areas. As Jess notes, the old growth Northern red oak dominated stand at the headwaters of Dismal Cove is probably the only such stand in the state of Georgia. Enormous Red oaks dominate the canopy, along with Yellow birch and an occasional Buckeye. We surveyed this stand with a writer from Blue Ridge Outdoors, who will be writing a story for the next issue about Jess and our survey. The headwaters of Betty Creek in Mountaintown roadless area revealed additional old growth this year as well. Large diameter Tulip trees are scattered throughout the uncut area over a couple of hundred acres, along with large diameter Chestnut oaks. These two wilderness candidates need all the help they can get in gaining permanent protection, and hopefully our research will help.

Our old growth research still needs to be incorporated into the new forest plan. Guidelines from the regional office state that new forest plans have to incorporate old growth protection and to accept data from the public. We have used Forest Service protocols and guidelines in all of our survey work, and it is now time for them to map it and allocate it to old growth prescriptions. They have expressed some resistance to this, citing time restraints, but we are working with them and the region to insure that it is incorporated. You can’t argue with Jess’s work – it’s the best, and we’re lucky to have him. He’s done another great summer of work for Georgia Forestwatch.

By Brent Martin

GFW Member Tom Fowler
with old growth hickory

Salamander Survey

Georgia Forestwatch recently received a grant from Patagonia to survey the Salamander populations of Kelly Ridge. Salamanders are extremely sensitive to road building and logging practices. This survey should contribute to our efforts to make sure that Kelly Ridge becomes a Wilderness area. We will be contracting an expert to aid our efforts and will need volunteers to help round up the critters. The survey should take place in the Spring. So, stay tuned for further information.

Black-bellied Salamander ~ Desmognathus quadramaculatus
Forest Management for the Birds?

Due to the diligence of Partners in Flight and the recent Executive Order to protect the declining bird populations, the Forest Service is beginning to actively manage public lands for birds. Primarily they are focusing on species that have been identified as being in decline. The Cerulean Warbler and the Golden-winged Warbler populations are in decline and those two species have become the representatives for the suite of bird species that are associated with them.

The Cerulean Warbler is often associated with old growth like conditions. It needs large trees with adjacent gaps that have vertical structure for foraging. The Forest Service plans to mimic these conditions in an experimental effort to provide for this species. The experiment should compare several treatments to determine which is most effective at increasing the occurrences of the Cerulean. At present, this project is in the development phase, however, the new forest plan has areas set aside as Cerulean Warbler experimental Management areas.

The Golden-winged Warbler, on the other hand, is said to benefit from large openings in high elevations. In order to manage for this species, the Forest Service plans to clear cut 20-40 acre areas above 3,000 feet in elevation. Again, this is said to benefit a suite of species including some game birds such as the Ruffed Grouse. The new forest plan has prescription areas that are designed to provide this habitat in several areas of the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Under most circumstances we would consider managing for declining bird populations a wonderful victory, however, there are a few drawbacks. Unfortunately, managing for a single species or even a suite of species will adversely impact other populations in the forest. It seems that little attention has been paid to the effects of this management on the reptiles, amphibians and aquatic creatures that may be impacted in the management area. We have concerns that this type of management will bring with it road building and skid trails. Roads and logging have been shown to adversely impact reptile and amphibian, particularly salamander, populations. Also, skid trails and roads contribute to the sediment load that streams carry and therefore adversely impact aquatic organisms.

Management for bird species has become a mantra within the Forest Service. It seems that there is a drive to apply this treatment to the entire forest even though much of it is still in the experimental phase. We have found that this is also a tool the Georgia DNR is using to oppose Wilderness Areas. The sad part is that Wilderness areas will eventually naturally provide the type of habitat needed for Ceruleans. There is still much research needed to find out how best to deal with the declining bird populations. Ceruleans in particular need good science to find out why they are declining and what can be done. The bottom line is: scientists don’t know yet. The experimental nature of the developing proposal is key. However, we see that many people in the Forest Service and the GA DNR are already saying that they need the freedom to apply this treatment to the rest of the forest, which is a totally inappropriate attitude, and raises red flags of caution. It would be like advertising a new wonder drug without testing it first!

This type of management could possibly be used responsibly, and be beneficial to the land. Unfortunately, it can also be abused and if applied indiscriminately to the landscape can be used to cut timber under the guise of bird management. This is an issue that Georgia Forestwatch will be monitoring closely, so look forward to more news on the management of birds.

~~~Katherine Groves is Georgia Forestwatch Staff Ecologist

Ruffed grouse use over 334 known plant species and eat the fruit, seed, buds, catkins and green parts. Insects are essential food for broods from late May through July.

Spring: apple, shadbush, yellow birch, sumac, strawberry, hop hornbeam, various catkins, mountain laurel, partridgeberry, hawthorn, succulent forage

Summer: strawberry, mulberry, jewelweed, grapes, acorns, insects, black cherry, raspberry, blackberry, dewberry

Autumn: sumac, birch dogwood, mountain laurel, clover, hepatica, teaberry, Christmas fern, goldenseal, Japanese honeysuckle, hawthorn, apple, viburnum, beech, huckleberry

Winter: greenbriar, hazelnut, sumac, birch, hop hornbeam, grape, apple, acorns ...source: SC State DNR.
Plan Revision Update

On Saturday, August 24th, public meetings were held at the Forest Supervisor's office in Gainesville. The purpose of these meetings was to "roll" the rolling alternative. Public comments were written down and the ID team will be reviewing them to determine where the perceived problems with the plan are. We feel that the meetings were successful primarily due to our efforts in holding two separate workshops with our members and other conservation groups in Georgia regarding the way to effectively comment on the process, and the work of those people who diligently prepared for this meeting by educating themselves. About 70-80 people showed up for the meetings and the majority were from the conservation community. We can expect that some changes to the plan will occur in the next month, hopefully based on the strong comments received by members who attended our workshops. The ID team is scheduled to have a Draft Plan into the Regional office of U.S. Forest Service by October 1st. The Regional office of U.S. Forest Service will check all five forest plans for consistency and may require some changes before the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is released for public comment. The DEIS should be released in January and a public comment period will follow. At present, we have several concerns about the plan and its ability to provide protection for key aspects of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Our primary concerns are areas of Old-Growth, Ephemeral Stream protection, keeping our inventoried roadless areas in prescriptions that will maintain their roadless character, and ORV activity. We are working to make sure that all of these issues and more are adequately addressed in the new forest plan. Stay tuned for how you can provide meaningful input on the DEIS at the start of the new year.

Katherine Groves is Georgia Forestwatch Staff Ecologist

From page 2 Director's Editorial:

they would change? Driving out from Winding Stair Gap, miles from a paved road, we came upon a giant red pickup truck flipped upside down in the road. Beer cans were strewn everywhere, garbled music blared from the crushed cab, shotgun shells and fishing gear scattered about the road. A large Bowie knife lay ominously in the road. Down the road, the driver staggered toward us, drunk, with arms stretched out to proclaim his guilt. It wouldn't be soon though, I thought... It probably wouldn't be soon.

Darter Survey Update

During a two week long survey of the Upper Coosa River Basin, Georgia Forestwatch staff and volunteers worked with David A. Etnier Ph.D. collecting darters in many streams. We were in the field March 18th through 22nd, April 22nd through 24th, and May 7th and 8th. During that time, we sampled 26 locations and found Goldline Darters at seven of those locations. However, the crews also found Bronze Darters, Holiday Darters, Greenbreast Darters, Speckled Darters, Logperch, several species of minnows and many other fish totaling 38 species in all. Everyone who participated enjoyed the opportunity to get into their local streams and learn about the aquatic fauna.

The results of the study showed that there is cause for concern. The Goldline Darter (Percina aurorubens) is listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species. They are only found in two river systems in the world, one is the Coosawattee River in Northern Georgia and the other is the Cahaba River in Alabama. The recovery goals for this species include ensuring that the existing populations are stable or increasing for at least five years. Unfortunately, this report suggests that the Goldline Darter populations in the Upper Coosa River Basin may not be stable at all.

We were also able to gain useful information as to the distribution of the species and its preferred habitat. Goldline Darters, like most darters prefer medium to large rivers with clean, non-silted, oxygenated, flowing water. They occur in swift water areas about 2-3 feet deep over small cobbles. Unfortunately, a lot of this type of habitat has been severely impacted by sedimentation and other pollutants upstream. The streams that were sampled within the National Forest appeared healthy, with large riparian buffers. However, it is critical that they remain so, degrading the headwater reaches of the Coosa Basin would be tantamount to cutting the head off of the watershed, and all of the organisms found downstream would suffer.

Another fact that was uncovered during our survey was that there were stretches of the Coosawattee River that were found to have a curiously low abundance of fish. Dr. Etnier speculated that it might be due to episodic pollution events. However, the cause is unknown.

It was very obvious to all of the participants how rare the Goldline Darter is and how precious our Northern Georgia watersheds are. We had many local volunteers who participated in the fieldwork who have been forever changed. We also received very good coverage in our local newspaper.

Continued on pg. 12
by Wayne Jenkins, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition Field Organizer for GFW & The Wilderness Society

I am writing to inform the members of Georgia Forestwatch (GFW) of work being done in conjunction with GFW staff through their relationship with the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition (SAFC). SAFC's role is to gain forest protection on publicly held lands by creating a regional identity for the Southern Appalachian area and by assisting its grassroots member groups in each of the six Southern Appalachian states with their ongoing work.

I was hired by SAFC back in January as their Georgia Field Organizer and I work primarily with the two Georgia partners, GFW and The Wilderness Society (TWS); out of the GFW office in Ellijay. Our goal is the goal of greater protection of our Mountain Treasures areas on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest (CONF). My early work was comprised of building support and gaining endorsements for SAFC's, 'Return the Great Forest' campaign, with a regional focus and Georgia's, 'Mountain Treasures Protection Proposal (GMTPP), which is the Georgia portion of a comprehensive approach to forest protection in our region. The GMTPP now has 70 endorsers and has coalesced into the Coalition for WILD GA which is working toward permanent protection for 241,400 acres in eight categories on the CONF.

GFW has been working diligently over the last 5 years to have as much of these areas protected through the Forest Service Planning process as possible and we should all realize the pivotal role we have played in getting some of these areas included in this planning cycle. Now is a good time to look beyond the Forest Plan to the legislative process for the permanent protection that only a Congressional bill will provide for the areas in the plan we want protected further and especially those areas the Forest Service has deemed unworthy of greater protection from threats of road building and timber extraction.

The long-term goal of my work is a Wilderness/Special Areas Bill. With the assistance of the staff of GFW, TWS and the other Coalition for WILD GA partners I am concentrating on a legislative campaign through these avenues:

1.) Building support locally in the Counties which comprise the CONF
2.) Educating and seeking support from County Commissioners, Chambers of Commerce & local businesses
3.) Meetings with Congressional Representatives & their staff to inform and build support
4.) Production of a WILD GA document to be used for a legislative campaign
5.) Increase endorsement by other Groups, Educators, Businesses etc. for the GMTPP
6.) Use and increase media contacts for education and support

This work is well underway with initial visits with most north GA County Commissioners and many Chambers of Commerce. Meetings with Congressional staffers are ongoing and a strategy for a bill in the next two years is evolving itself. This is certainly an uphill climb but I am hopeful and believe that by understanding our political leaders, cultivating the right relationships and creating public pressure/support at the right time we can achieve the protection we have long sought for our beloved Georgia Mountain Treasures. I hope you are as excited by this prospect as I am and if you have any ideas, suggestions or strategic contacts that may assist us in this work, let me know. I am available to give presentations covering the Georgia Mountain Treasures Protection Proposal upon request, so if you know of a group who would be interested contact me at the office via phone or e-mail.

Thanks!

~Wayne Jenkins  e elaitseyi@ellijay.com  p 706/635-8740

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Chattahoochee National Forest

Mountain Treasures Protection Proposal (Legislative Component)

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Georgia Forestwatch joins the Georgia Water Coalition

Georgia's growing population is placing ever-increasing demands on a resource we used to be able to take for granted: water. We're not about to run out of water, but there's no real system for allocating water to competing users: counties and cities want drinking water, farmers want water for irrigation, power companies want a steady flow of water through their dams to generate electricity, but the lakeshore residents want levels high for recreation. In the year 2000, several statewide non-profit groups, working together, crafted the "Georgia Water Bill of Rights" to provide a focus for the debate on the management and disposition of water in the state. (See http://home.att.net/~georgiawaterrights/index.html for more on the Water Bill of Rights.) An essential goal was to see to it that Georgia continued to recognize water as a public resource—that we would never be faced with water markets where landowners had unlimited rights to sell the water flowing through, or under, their land. (This is how things are done in some Western states.)

At first it looked like smooth sailing. Last year, the Georgia General Assembly passed legislation to form the "Joint Comprehensive Water Advisory Study Committee" (often called the "Joint Study Committee," or JSC), which will soon dissolve as it issues its guidelines for the first comprehensive statewide water planning effort. The more permanent "North Georgia Metropolitan Water District," also created in 2001, will have a role in determining whether the water needs for North Georgia will be met by more conservation or by more new reservoirs. Folks who were following the work of these bodies were guardedly optimistic that they would come come up with plans that were in the interests of all Georgians.

However, as the Joint Study Committee has neared the completion of its work, at the last minute all mention of water as a public resource was stripped during its August

1st meeting. After the meeting, the Savannah Morning News quoted Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's Sally Betha as saying "the process made me nauseous. Every environmental safeguard was deep-sixed by the committee through an orchestrated effort and a rewrite of history." According to the paper, the minutes showed that in June the committee approved the same list of seven principles, but committee member George McIntosh, a cotton and peanut farmer from Albany, said that according to his notes the vote never happened, and forced a re-vote.

Georgia Forestwatch will remained focused on our core goal of protecting the public forestlands of the state, but we welcome the opportunity to be involved in this important coalition. Many groups we work with on other issues are leaders in the Water Coalition, including the Georgia Wildlife Federation, the Georgia Conservancy, the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, and Georgia Conservation Voters. It is expected that the coalition's work will have to be distributed over at least the next two legislative sessions – in other words, through Spring 2004, if not longer. Since the headwaters of so many of Georgia's rivers start in the Chattahoochee National Forest, Georgia ForestWatch is particularly interested in any outcome that would give downstream users a say in the preservation of upstream water quality. We'll be sure to keep you posted.

Two Georgia Forestwatch board members, Georgia Public Interest Research Group's Jen Giegerich and David James, are actively involved in the Water Coalition's campaigns. Reach Jen at georgiapirg@earthlink.net, and David at david.james@mindspring.com.

For more information on the Georgia Water Coalition itself, call the Georgia Wildlife Federation's Sarah Gaines at (770) 787-7887, or e-mail her at sgaines@gwf.org. For more details on our own work on the connection between a river's headwaters, the management of its watershed, and the health of the surrounding forests, see our website at http://www.gfw.org/watershed.html.

The Old Man in the Tree (center) casts a discerning eye over the Conasauga River - Cohutta Ranger District photo by Charles Seifried
Chattooga R.D...........................................con't from pg. 4
and their importance beyond a source for wood products.

As the day progressed I saw his message lost in talk of profit, comfort, convenience and recreation demands. There were few voices for protecting the health of forest ecosystems as a first priority.

Dr. Eugene Odum, who passed away in early August authored the most important ecology text and founded the Institute of Ecology at UGA. He was a person of great vision. He was modest, generous and willing to talk to scientists and amateurs alike. His message was that economics and ecology are inseparable if we are to live a healthy world in which to live. He inspired a great number of students and scientists to carry that message forward. It is obvious, even in the wonderful view from Currahee Mountain, that the destruction and dismantling of ecosystems continues every day. Not enough people have heard the message! We must continue to expand our efforts in getting this message out and in protecting the forest ecosystems on our National Forests.

~~James Sullivan is a GFW founding member, current board member and Chattooga District Leader.

LWCF Update

For sale signs in the upper Jacks River watershed prior to purchase by the U.S. Forest Service ~ photo Michael Cunningham

Through the collaboration and coordination of The Nature Conservancy’s Steve Friedman, U.S. Forest Service’s Jim Kidd and Larry Luckett, GFW staff and volunteers were able to help the Chattahoochee National Forest become fully funded by the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for fiscal year 2003. Georgia Forestwatch believes southern forests have been under-funded for entirely too long. Thank you to the above mentioned and the willing sellers that made this work possible. For more info on LWCF contact Angela Faye Martin 706-635-TREE

Ozone Burns ............................................con't from pg. 4
the FS and Ducks Unlimited want to “open up” already serves as prime habitat for a suite of wetland bird species including the common yellowthroat, Louisiana waterthrush, Acadian flycatcher, woodcock and perhaps king and Virginia rails (Giff Beaton, Georgia Ornithological Society, personal communication). In addition, four-toed salamanders-listed as rare or uncommon (S3) by the Georgia Natural Heritage Program have been found breeding on the edges of the beaver pond in 109 (Elliott et al 2002). Little is known of the habits and sensitivities of such species. On the other hand, open water, beloved of Canada goose, pied grebes and other waterfowl is in quite plentiful supply throughout the Piedmont! The wetland in question is 72 acres (from CISC). I estimate from 1999 color infrared aerial photographs that ~30 of those acres is dominated by marsh grasses including floating mats, 3 or 4 acres of open water and the rest in open swampy forest. The entire complex is surrounded by nearly 900 acres of forest. This plus unusual soils and flora make this a very unique and precious resource on the Piedmont. Beaver wetlands of this size are unusual both because landowners often control them and because the perched water table formed under these Iredell soils allows for a larger pond to form. As such, this is already a great wildlife habitat and should be respected and left alone. Sometimes the best management is no management!

Upland stands in lower Putnam and upper Jones Counties—where management for RCW is ongoing—often include relatively small (5-10 acre) mafic outcrops which support a unique community of plants. These are sites which were never plowed historically and serve as a refuge of biodiversity. It is not clear that frequent winter burns will serve to maintain this diversity. Rather, the outcrops form a rare community that is best managed by allowing natural disturbance but limiting active management.

For all the above reasons, I would like to petition that Turkey Neck, the Monticello Glades (excepting Stands 8 and 2) and all bottomland and hardwood stands be removed from the list of stands proposed for burning. In addition, mafic outcrops should be mapped prior to burning and protected from fire by narrow plow lines.

References
Oconee Office Update

As we move into our fifth month, the Oconee office is up and running and moving forward. We have spent much of our time focusing on the critical task of fundraising. Fundraising has the potential to be a full time job but we’ve established a good balance between developmental and issues related work.

We are actively pursuing air quality issues as well. We are currently involved in a lawsuit against the EPA for failing to regulate Georgia’s EPD Title V permitting process. For more information on this important suit, please see “EPD Fails to Protect Georgia’s Air.”

We have also learned much in the way of fire management. The Oconee District Ranger’s office issued a scoping notice stating they intend to burn approximately 18,000 acres of the forest over the next two years. This is about 15% of the forest so it obviously raises some red flags. This issue is still progressing and I hope to have a report for you all in the next newsletter.

We have been working on the plan revision, specifically where it concerns the Oconee National Forest. Much of the plan looks good so far, including a potential Wild and Scenic River designation for the Ocmulgee River. However, things seem to change daily so we are monitoring the process carefully.

Finally, we are in the midst of planning fall and winter outings on the Oconee. Please see our “Upcoming Events” section for more details.

*If you would like to contribute to the success of the Oconee office, please do so by submitting a donation to the Georgia Forestwatch Ellijay office.

~~Katie Rodgers is GFW Oconee-Athens Program Coordinator

Atamasco lilies on the Oconee National Forest

EPD Fails to Protect Georgia’s Air

Interposed between Georgians and air pollution is the Clean Air Act. In simple terms, the Clean Air Act sets standards for safe air and then issues Title V permits to major stationary sources of air pollution as well as implementing regulations of mobile sources. The permits are designed to ensure that aggregate air pollution does not create unhealthy air. According to the EPA, Title V operating permits are a vehicle to ensure that facilities comply with all applicable Clean Air Act requirements. (*) Title V permits are issued by individual state Environmental Protection Divisions. The Georgia EPD was charged with not following requirements set forth in Title V permitting processes. The EPA requested comments from the public on Georgia’s Title V permitting program. GA Center for Law in the Public Interest submitted comments on behalf of GFW and other organizations in which we cited sixteen deficiencies where the EPD has failed to comply with the EPAs Title V process. These issues include everything from the need to create a mailing list to notify the public of draft operating permits to the EPD’s failure to include compliance schedules within permits for facilities currently out of compliance. Approximately one year after submitting our comments, the EPA responded by choosing to correct all but five of our complaints. The court instructed us to resolve these issues through mediation. We have entered into mediation regarding the five issues not accepted by the EPA. The exceptions are briefly listed below:

♦ EPD’s permits do not require adequate reporting – Facilities should be submitting all monitoring data every six months. The EPD only requires facilities to report their own violations as they occur. They do not enforce six month reporting.
♦ EPD’s public notification and public participation efforts are inadequate - The public notice must provide the end date for the EPA and public comment periods. This information is not readily available.
♦ EPD’s public notification and public participation efforts are inadequate - Prepare an adequate public notice system including a comprehensive mailing list.
♦ EPD’s public notification and public participation efforts are inadequate - Final permits need to be renoticed for another comment period. This is because over 200 permits were issued without public notice.

We believe the permits should be reopened for public comment.
♦ EPD is not including required compliance schedules in permits for facilities currently out of compliance. All facilities operating out of compliance should have a schedule listing measures to be taken to bring their facilities back within compliance.

............................................GA’s Air con’t pg. 12
We are now in the midst of mediation, which includes a series of offers, counteroffers, and conditions. We expect to reach the point of a decision in early Spring 2003. We will keep you posted on this issue as it progresses.

(*) Summary taken from Catchwell Tank Alliance ‘Petition of Title V Permit’, Author: Robert Uksiley

--- by Katie Prodgers

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Fall/Winter Events

October 12th:
- Outing to the Oconee Nat'l Forest to look at proposed Old Growth Restoration Area. (RSVP to Katie Prodgers) oconeeforestwatch@hotmail.com or call (706) 316-3110

As additional events or outings are planned they will be posted on the Georgia Forestwatch website: www.gafw.org

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Heron feather & river rocks from the Conasauga River by Angela Faye Martin

can't from pg. 7

We feel that this project was a success because we had the help and support of so many people in the conception and implementation phases of the project. Unfortunately, the results show that the Goldline Darter populations of this area have not been quite so successful. However, there was so much local support generated by this project that many people have considered forming a local watershed association, which will hopefully be able to turn the tide for the beautiful little jewel called the Goldline Darter.

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GEORGIA FORESTWATCH MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: (please, print)  
Email: 

Address: 

City:  
State:  
Zip:  

Phone: 

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

(please, circle one)  

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Make checks payable to: GEORGIA FORESTWATCH 15 Tower Rd., Ellijay, GA 30540

Exp.__/_______
We accept... MC  Visa  AMEX  circle one

Dear GFW member, do you...

HIKE  FISH  HUNT  SNORKEL
(circle one)

Other:

Thank you --

GFW Staff

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GFW Forest News – Autumn 2002